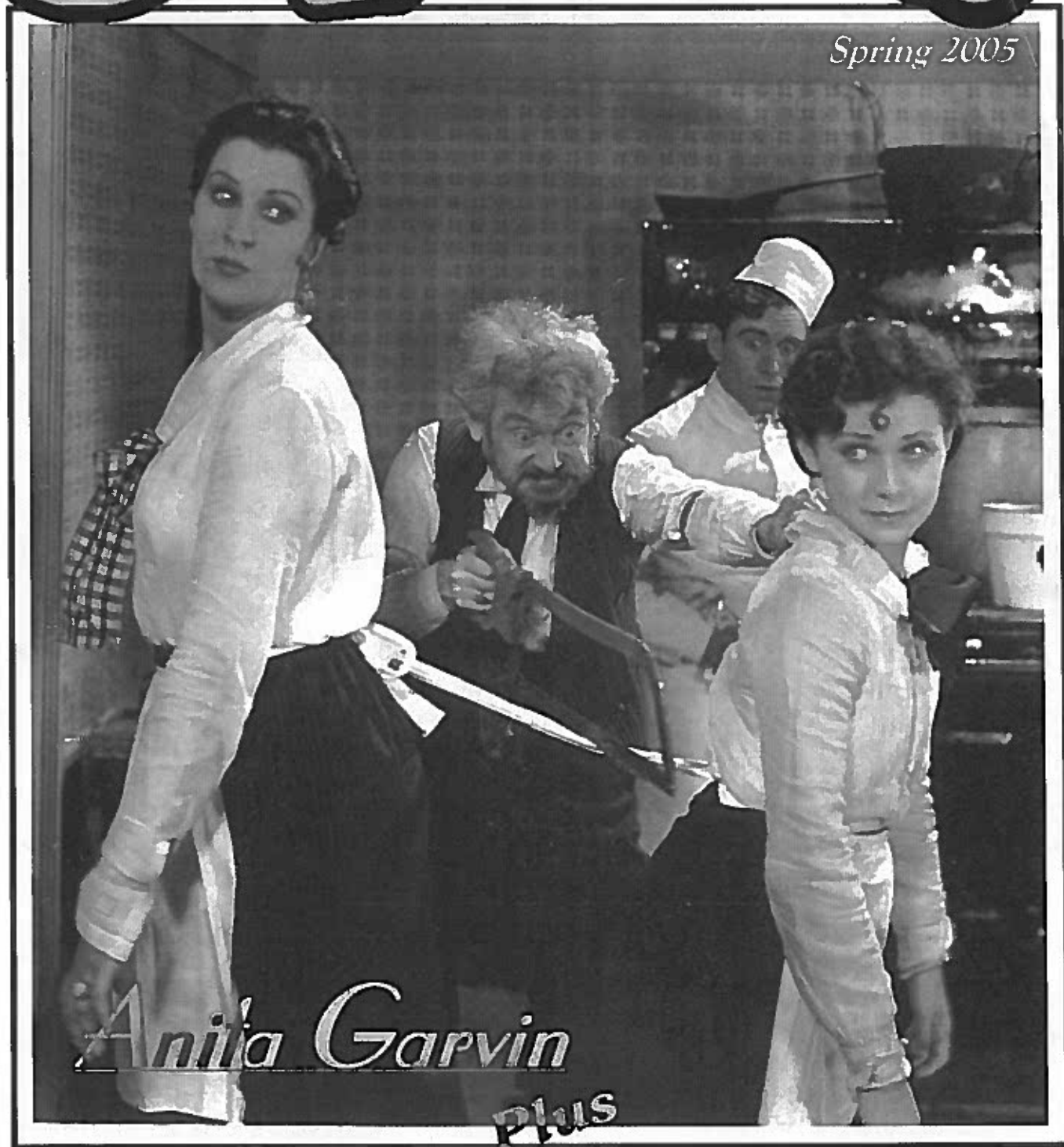


SlapStick!

11

Spring 2005



Anita Garvin

plus

COMEDY TEAMS OF THE TEENS AND TWENTIES • THE RISE AND
FALL OF THE STERLING UNIVERSAL FILM COMPANY

SlapStick! Bathing Beauties

Eye-Candy from the Fox Sunshine Com.



The snipe says: Little wonder these two Sunshine Bathing Girls of the Fox Sunshine Comedies are so radiant. They have good reason to be happy, for the Sunshine Comedies, of which they are a refreshing part, are meeting with tremendous success. The Sunshine Bathing girls are a joyful combination of vigor and beauty.



sands to the joys of silent comedy. These were produced by a man named DAVID SHEPARD, in charge of the old Blackhawk Films catalogue, one of the more influential slo-mo enthusiasts, quite devoted to turning silent soufflés into bricks.

When did this tempo tampering begin? Was the original sin a simple misunderstanding of the sound/silent switch on early home movie projectors? Early movie cameras were able to run at 18 frames per second in order to allow the average consumer to get more out of his roll of film. The resulting designation on the projector needed to distinguish between sound films, which had to be run at 24 fps, and home movies shot at the slower rate. The two speeds traditionally remained on the projectors, seemingly impressing a future generation of film collectors as the way that silents were "supposed to look." It has proved to be a virulent strain of thought.

What does the future hold? There are encouraging signs. My brother tells me that all but one of the silents at Syracuse's Cinefest 25 was shown correctly. Last year's

wonderful Slapsticon II showed all of its many, many silents at 24. But it's still pretty grim, generally. Turner Classic Movies is hot or cold. They show some silents at an acceptable pace, and then they'll show Kino's funereal fidos. Example: I see the beloved Charley Chase is going to be the subject of an upcoming marathon – I also see these two-reelers are clocking in a glue-in-the-machinery 25 or so minutes. What a lousy introduction to such a superb comedian!

I call on every silent film fan to stir things up. Ask at what speed films are to be shown. Request that the DVDs and tapes be at the right speed before you buy them. Make your desires known! Let's try to amend this assault on our favorite art form. Let's educate people about this situation. It will only increase the enjoyment and increase the appeal of these "silver dreams."

Thanks to Dave Stevenson, Steve Massa, Mark Johnson

HOW YOUR GRANDPARENTS SAW THEM!

(When comedy projection speeds were never in doubt!)

A group of Canadian and British soldiers gather around an advertisement for the Fox Sunshine Comedy *Hungry Lions in a Hospital*. The date is April 7th, 1919 and the location is the Canadian training Centre at Seaford, Sussex, England. *Hungry Lions* appears to have been playing at their camp's recreation hall on April 9th, 10th and 11th.

Collection of Dave and Ali Stevenson



Anita Garvin is one of the best-loved character comedienne, whose particular form of female menace graced many films of the '20s and '30s. She is particularly remembered for the Laurel and Hardy comedies. In this article I'll try to highlight her many other roles.

Miss Garvin was stage-struck early in life. She was quite tall and developed for age 12, and this surely helped her win a role as a supposed Mack Sennett Bathing Beauty in a 1919 live promotion appearance for the Paramount comedy series. (Ironically, she never actually appeared in a Sennett film.)

From this humble entry into showbiz, her statuesque beauty quickly brought her to the pinnacle of Broadway, a famous 1922 Flo Ziegfeld show called *The Midnight Frolic*. Here she was befriended by the show's star, Will Rogers. Ziegfeld then found a spot for Anita in the roadshow version of another one of his Broadway musical hits, *Sally*.

During the show's appearance in Los Angeles, in either late 1923 or early 1924, she dropped in on her friend Will Rogers, now working at the Hal Roach Studios. A photographer from the *Los Angeles Examiner* captured the event.

Once in Hollywood, Anita went for what she really wanted — a career in the movies. She did the unthinkable, quitting Ziegfeld for a lower-paying job in films. She was first hired by the Al Christie studio, where her initial film was *Bright Lights*, a two-reeler starring Bobby Vernon, released in September 1924. In the film, Bobby has come from the country in search of his girlfriend, Anne Cornwall. He finds that she is in a nightclub chorus line. Anita remembered her "big scene" fondly ... Bobby, feeling playful, flips a pat of butter from his table on to the dance floor. Anita (the tallest of the girls) slips up and falls on her tail. This leads to the usual pursuit of Mr. Vernon all around the building and rooftops.

In her apparent naïveté, Anita asked studio head Al Christie for a starring series. Christie declined, and she found herself in several infrequent small parts instead.

Anita's next known role is in the bizarre feature *The Last Man on Earth*, released in November 1924. In this film, all the men in the world die off when a plague of "masculitis" envelops the world in 1950. When a man (Earle Foxe) is discovered, he is auctioned off to the richest women in the world. One of the gang of millionairesses is Anita Garvin. (This is a film to watch for — an eclectic mix of science fiction, Ziegfeld Follies, and Sunshine Comedy!)

Garvin made many appearances in forgotten comedies for Christie, Educational, Universal, Rock, and Fox. Documenting her appearances in the last three is never likely to be complete, as these studios left very poor records and only a small percentage of their output survives. Anita seems to have been in many of Universal's Century and Bluebird Comedies, but I've only been able to nail down a couple of Century Comedies, and none of the Bluebirds. (She was in a group of the Arthur Lake series, but titles are unknown.)

At the Joe Rock studio, Anita made an important connection in Stan Laurel. He cast her as the girl in *The Snow Hawk* (1925) but she fell ill and was replaced. The film was shot at Truckee, California, a location often used for snow-covered "northerns" about Mounties and the Gold Rush. While there, Stan directed a Jimmy Aubrey comedy, *Book Bozo*, in which Anita does appear. She has a very undemanding role, as one of a group of girls watching a boxing match from the stands. Anita also has a brief role as a sleepwalker in the confusing Laurel/Rock short *The Sleuth*.

In late 1925, Anita's long association with Educational Studios began. Over the years, she would work with most of Educational's stars, great and mediocre, from Lloyd Hamilton, Lupino Lane, Lige Conley, and Cliff Bowes, to Johnny Arthur, Ray McKee and Lou Archer. Here she met her first husband, second-echelon comedian Clem Beauchamp, a.k.a. Jerry Drew. They appeared together in one film, *Brunettes Prefer Gentlemen* (1927). At Educational, she had the tiniest role of her career — about six seconds long — as a screaming head sticking out of a door in a haunted house (*Creeps*, 1926).

March 15, 1926 was a watershed day in Anita Garvin's life. This was the first day she worked at the Hal Roach Studios, with which she is most identified. Her first film (although the second to be released) was *Raggedy Rose*, a Mabel Normand comedy also featuring Carl Miller, Max Davidson, and James Finlayson. Anita was delighted to be working with childhood favorite Normand at first, but it proved to be an unhappy experience owing to Mabel's deteriorating mental state. Mabel would tend to sit alone and talk to herself between takes, and had moments of hostility on the set. This unfortunate situation comes through in her Roach comedies, where she seems a bit spacey and even stunned at times. Anita played the nasty rich girl competing for playboy Carl Miller's affections with the rag-weaving



Arrival in Hollywood, late 1923 or early 1924. From left: Will Rogers, Shirley Vernon, Anita, unknown, Blanche Mehaffy and John McKenna (Will Rogers' personal secretary)
Cole Johnson Collection

Perhaps the most important drama film she ever appeared in was the Greta Garbo MGM feature *The Single Standard*. In it, she plays a short scene where she is cast off by Nils Asther for Greta. I'd have personally given Garbo the air in a second with such competition, but I digress....

Also in 1929, Anita appeared in what she called "Leo McCarey's only flop" – *Red Hot Rhythm*. This was a musical with color sequences, supposed to be a big one for Pathé, but it turned out otherwise. (One non-Garvin reel survives.)

The releases of the cash-strapped Educational studios were becoming ever-more awful. Titles like *Hunting the Hunter* and *Trouble for Two* should only be viewed if you're curious about how bad an early talkie can be.

More important were her appearances in the now-talking Hal Roach comedies, beginning with a major role in Charley Chase's hilarious *Stepping Out*. In this one, she plays a gum-chewing manicure girl picked up by Charley, and she makes a scene at a nightclub.

The films Anita is best remembered for are perhaps the classic Laurel and Hardy talkies *Blotto* and *Be Big!* Here her character's persona has been fixed, as the murderously jealous shrew, ready to shoot her husband rather than see him have a good time!

A memorable role came for Anita when *Be Big!* was also made in French (*Les Carottiers*) and Spanish (*Los Calaveras*). (Versions of *Laughing Gravy* were also tacked on to these.) Anita remembered how these films were made. They felt her reading of the phonetic lines unsuitable, so she was asked to just move her mouth, while an off-screen girl spoke the foreign lines, like a cartoon-dubbing session. However, the films definitely show the lines are dubbed in post-production.

During this time, in 1930, Anita was married for the second time, to bandleader Red Stanley. It was a happy marriage, lasting until Red's death in 1980. (In an odd cinematic coincidence, Red Stanley plays Marion Byron's boyfriend – they even kiss – in the short subject *Susie's*



The Valley of Hell (Big Horn Ranch/MGM 1927)

Steve Randisi Collection

Affairs (Columbia 1934).

In 1932, Anita appeared in one of Thelma Todd's starring shorts, *Show Business*. In this one, she delivers an hilariously over-the-top performance as an obnoxious prima donna star of a train-traveling musical show. Thelma and ZaSu Pitts cause her numerous unintended indignities until all three are kicked off the train in the end! (This is Jules White's solo Roach credit. He felt there was a lot of potential in this tale, and when he was the head of Columbia's comedy unit, he refashioned it for the Three Stooges as *A Pain in the Pullman* (1936).)

Anita appeared in two more Roach shorts: *Asleep in the Feet* (1933), again with beloved blonde Thelma Todd, and a last Charley Chase, *His Silent Racket* (1933).

In the early '30s, Anita had to turn down many roles offered to her while she raised a family. Several roles came her way from the newly organized short-subject units at Columbia and RKO, where she worked with stars ranging from Edgar Kennedy and Leon Errol to Jed Prouty and Walter Catlett.

In 1934 she made her smallest talkie appearance, speaking one line in the feature *The Merry Wives of Reno* for Warner Bros. During a trip east in 1935, she appeared in a Brooklyn-made Vitaphone short, a so-so rip-off of *Unaccustomed As We Are*, which starred future Stooge Shemp Howard, with Anita typecast as the shrewish wife.

While in New York, she made her last Educational film, a typically God-awful effort at this point called *Sleepless Hollow* (1936), an oft-filmed comedy plot in which a just-married couple stay with a hillbilly family. The dingy-looking thing looks like it cost three dollars to make. At one point you can see Anita, in bed in the dark, tug on the supposedly pesky spring blinds and set them to flipping loudly, supposedly disturbing the couple's sleep.

In 1938 she was slated for a large role in the Laurel and Hardy feature *Swiss Miss*, but owing to illness got only a small, uncredited one. She was off the screen for a year. In 1940 Anita did get one more role – a substantial one – with those with whom she's most closely identified. The Roach studio completed *A Chump at Oxford*, but it was felt to be



The Charlatan (Universal 1929). From left: Rockcliffe Fellows, Fred Mackaye, Anita and Philo McCullough

Cole Johnson Collection

An Anita Garvin Filmography

Compiled by Cole Johnson

Release dates in brackets

* Not known to exist

† Incomplete

Bright Lights (9/14/24)

Christie/Educational; Bobby Vernon series; 2 reels
Directed by Walter Graham and Bobby Vernon
With: Anne Cornwall, Jay Belasco, Evelyn Francisco

The Last Man on Earth (11/2/24)

Fox; 7 reels
Directed by John G. Blystone
With: Earle Foxe, Derelys Perdue, Clarissa Selwynne, Marie Astaire, Grace Cunard, Gladys Tennyson, Fay Holderness, Marion Aye, Maurice Murphy, Harry Dunkinson, Pauline French, Jean Dumas, Marjorie Beebe, Lois Boyd

A Dangerous Peach* (2/18/25)

Universal; Century Comedies; 2 reels
Directed by Jess Robbins
With: Al Alt

The Sleuth (6/30/25)

Joe Rock Productions/F.B.O.; Stan Laurel Comedies; 2 reels
Directed by Joe Rock and Harry Sweet
With: Stan Laurel, Glen Cavender, Alberta Vaughn

Book Bozo (8/15/25)

Joe Rock Productions/F.B.O.; Jimmy Aubrey Comedies; 2 reels
Directed by Stan Laurel
With: Jimmy Aubrey

Sweet and Pretty* (11/8/25)

Educational; Cameo Comedies; 1 reel
Directed by Jess Robbins
With: Cliff Bowes, Virginia Vance

A Taxi War* (11/11/25)

Universal; Century Comedies; 2 reels
Directed by Noel M. Smith
With: Eddie Gordon

Fair but Foolish (11/29/25)

Christie/Educational; 2 reels
Directed by William H. Watson
With: Jimmie Adams

My Swedie (12/13/25)

Christie/Educational; 2 reels
Directed by Harold Beaudine
With: Neal Burns

Going Crazy* (5/9/26)

Educational; Mermaid Comedies; 2 reels
Directed by Charles Lamont
With: Lige Conley

Creeps (5/30/26)

Educational; 2 reels
Directed by Norman Taurog
With: Lou Archer, Phil Dunham, Spencer Bell

Nothing Matters (6/6/26)

Educational; Hamilton Comedies; 2 reels
Directed by Norman Taurog
With: Lloyd Hamilton

Move Along (7/25/26)

Educational; Hamilton Comedies; 2 reels
Directed by Norman Taurog
With: Lloyd Hamilton, Glen Cavender, Helen Foster

Kiss Papa* (8/22/26)

Educational; Mermaid Comedies; 2 reels
Directed by Stephen Roberts
With: Lige Conley, Lou Archer

Should Husbands Pay? (9/5/26)

Roach/Pathé; All-Star Comedies; 2 reels
Directed by Stan Laurel
With: James Finlayson, Tyler Brooke, Charlotte Mineau, Martha Sleeper, Vivien Oakland, Anders Randolph, Lyle Tayo, Tiny Sandford, Sammy Brooks, Helen Gilmore, Jerry Mandy

The Humdinger* (10/10/26)

Educational; Tuxedo Comedies; 2 reels
Directed by Norman Taurog
With: Johnny Arthur, George Davis

Raggedy Rose (11/7/26)

Roach/Pathé; All-Star Comedies; 5 reels
Directed by Stan Laurel and Richard Wallace
With: Mabel Normand, Carl Miller, Max Davidson, James Finlayson, Laura La Varnie, Jerry Mandy, Tyler Brooke, Sammy Brooks, Theodore von Eltz

Close Shaves* (12/5/26)

Educational; Tuxedo Comedies; 2 reels
Directed by Charles Lamont
With: Johnny Arthur

Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl* (12/19/26)

Fox; 6 reels
Directed by Irving Cummings
With: Madge Bellamy, Alan Simpson, Sally Phipps, Paul Nicholson, J. Farrell MacDonald, Ethel Wales, Arthur Housman, Harry Bailey



***The Play Girl** (4/22/28)**

Fox; 6 reels

Directed by Arthur Rosson

With: Madge Bellamy, Johnny Mack Brown, Lionel Belmore, Thelma Hill

***Fandango* (5/6/28)**

Educational; Lupino Lane series; 2 reels

Directed by "Henry W. George" (Lupino Lane)

With: Lupino Lane, Wallace Lupino

***Their Purple Moment* (5/19/28)**

Roach/MGM; Laurel & Hardy series; 2 reels

Directed by Fred Guiol and James Parrott

With: Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Leo Willis, Jimmy Aubrey, Kay Deslys, Fay Holderness, Tiny Sandford, Lyle Tayo

***Roaming Romeo* (7/29/28)**

Educational; Lupino Lane series; 2 reels

Directed by "Henry W. George" (Lupino Lane)

With: Lupino Lane, Wallace Lupino, Spencer Bell

***Imagine My Embarrassment!** (9/1/28)**

Roach/MGM; Charley Chase series; 2 reels

Directed by Hal Yates

With: Charley Chase, Jane La Verne, Edgar Kennedy, Vivien Oakland, Gene Morgan, Edna Marion

***The Night Watch** (9/9/28)**

First National; 7 reels

Directed by Alexander Korda

With: Billie Dove, Paul Lukas, Donald Reed, Nicholas Soussanin, William Tooker

***Feed 'Em and Weep* (12/8/28)**

Roach/MGM; All-Star series; 2 reels

Directed by Fred Guiol

With: Max Davidson, Marion Byron, Edgar Kennedy, Charlie Hall, Frank Alexander

***Going Ga-Ga* (1/5/29)**

Roach/MGM; All-Star series; 2 reels

Directed by Leo McCarey

With: Edgar Kennedy, Max Davidson, Kay Deslys, Marion Byron, Wally Albright

***A Pair of Tights* (2/2/29)**

Roach/MGM; All-Star series; 2 reels

Directed by Hal Yates

With: Marion Byron, Edgar Kennedy, Stu Erwin, Spec O'Donnell, Ellinor Vanderveer, Charlie Hall, James Burtis

***Off to Buffalo** (2/16/29)**

Roach/MGM; Charley Chase series; 2 reels

Directed by James W. Horne

With: Charley Chase, Vivien Oakland, Edgar Kennedy, Dell Henderson

***Trent's Last Case* (3/31/29)**

Fox; 6 reels

Directed by Howard Hawks

With: Raymond Griffith, Marceline Day, Raymond Hatton, Donald Crisp, Nicholas Soussanin, Edgar Kennedy

***The Charlatan* (4/14/29)**

Universal; 7 reels

Directed by George Melford

With: Holmes Herbert, Margaret Livingston, Rockliffe Fellowes, Philo McCullough, Crawford Kent, Rose Tapley, Fred Mackaye, Dorothy Gould

***All Steamed Up** (6/20/29)**

Fox; Clark & McCullough series; 3 reels

Directed by Norman Taurog

With: Bobby Clark, Paul McCullough, Gavin Gordon, Estelle Bradley. All-talking

***Modern Love†* (7/14/29)**

Universal; 6 reels

Directed by Arch Heath

With: Charley Chase, Kathryn Crawford, Jean Hersholt, Edward Martindel. Talking sequences

***The Single Standard* (7/29/29)**

MGM; 8 reels

Directed by John S. Robertson

With: Greta Garbo, Nils Asther, Johnny Mack Brown, Dorothy Sebastian, Lane Chandler. Music track

***Hunting the Hunter** (10/20/29)**

Educational; Cameo Comedies; 2 reels

Directed by Stephen Roberts

With: Raymond McKee, Harold Goodwin

***Stepping Out* (11/2/29)**

Roach/MGM; Charley Chase series; 2 reels

Directed by Warren Doane

With: Charley Chase, Thelma Todd

***Red Hot Rhythm†* (11/23/29)**

Pathé; 7 reels

Directed by Leo McCarey

With: Alan Hale, Kathryn Crawford, Walter O'Keefe, Josephine Dunn, Ilka Chase, Ernest Hilliard, Harry Bowen. Color sequences

***Dynamite* (12/13/29)**

MGM; 14 reels

Directed by Cecil B. DeMille

With: Conrad Nagel, Kay Johnson, Charles Bickford, Joel McCrea, Robert Edeson, Leslie Fenton, Tyler Brooke

***Blotto* (2/8/30)**

Roach/MGM; Laurel & Hardy series; 2 reels

Directed by James Parrott

With: Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Baldwin Cooke, Charlie Hall, Dick Gilbert, Frank Holliday, Tiny Sandford, Jean De Briac, Vladimir Gueteron, Jack Hill

***The Big Jewel Case** (2/23/30)**

Educational; Mermaid Talking Comedies; 2 reels

Directed by Stephen Roberts

With: Eddie Lambert, Fred Kelsey

***Whispering Whoopee* (3/8/30)**

Roach/MGM; Charley Chase series; 2 reels

Directed by James W. Horne

With: Charley Chase, Thelma Todd, Dolores Brinkman, Kay Deslys, Eddie Dunn, Dell Henderson, Carl Stockdale

RKO; Leon Errol series; 2 reels

With: Leon Errol, Sally Payne, Arthur O'Connell, Mervin Williams

RKO; Edgar Kennedy series; 2 reels

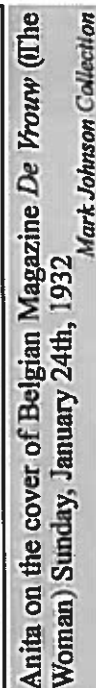
With: Edgar Kennedy, Vivien Oakland, Billy Franey, Jody Gilbert, Clara Blore

RKO; Leon Errol series; 2 reels

With: Leon Errol, Harry Harvey, Ken Christy, Arthur O'Connell, Dave Oliver

Columbia; Three Stooges series; 2 reels

With: Curly Howard, Moe Howard, Larry Fine, Dorothy Appleby, Lynton Brent, Bob O'Connor, Blanche Payson



Roamin' Romeo (Educational 7/29/28). Anita gets the better of Lupino Lane, a man she said she disliked enormously off camera as well as on. *Collection of Steve Rydzewski*

Collection of Steve Bydzewski
Cole Johnson

PART I: THE TEENS

The first film comedies were basically little one-joke vignettes: a country rube reacting to his first motion picture; a cook lighting a stove with kerosene and being blown out of the film frame. But soon film-makers tapped into material and traditions from other popular arts such as vaudeville and comic strips, and eventually began utilizing stories that depended on the characters and performances of the actors to create the comedy. By 1910 things really started to develop.

COMEDY'S CAINS AND ABELS

At the end of that year what appears to be the U.S. screen's first physically mismatched comedy duo – “Hank and Lank” – debuted at Essanay. Inspired by Bud Fisher's popular newspaper comic “Mutt and Jeff,” Broncho Billy Anderson discovered string bean Victor Potel dressing windows at Marshall Fields department store in Chicago, and grafted him to stunted Essanay stock company member and former vaudevillian Augustus Carney. Together they were hungry hoboes in only nine shorts made from late 1910 into January 1911, where they were always involved in schemes that had Lank ending up getting the worst of things. “Mutt and Jeff” themselves soon turned up in a series of 1911 live-action comedies from David Horsley's Nestor Films. Shot on the East Coast by Al Christie, the films were very primitive, made up of mostly long-shot tableaux. The characterizations were pretty indistinct too, with various people (including Bud Duncan) stepping in to play the leads from short to short. While both of these early series were short-lived and crude, they opened the floodgates for teams to follow.

BIG DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

At the same time, Mack Sennett had begun directing comedies for the Biograph Company. Starting with the studio in 1908 as a bit player and occasionally selling a scenario, Sennett worked in the films directed by D.W. Griffith and Frank Powell. In mid-1911, when Powell left Biograph for Paris and the Pathé Studio, Mack moved up to direction and put together a group of performers made up of himself, Mabel Normand, Fred Mace, Dell Henderson, Eddie Dillon, and occasionally Ford Sterling.



Mabel Normand about 1910

Gale Johnson Collection

They would be mixed and matched as the stories dictated, but in shorts like *A Spanish Dilemma*, *Tragedy of a Dress Suit* and *The Furs* (all 1912) they became an identifiable comedy ensemble. The teamwork became more pronounced when Keystone was formed and released its first films in September of 1912. There the group boiled down to Normand, Mace, Sterling and Sennett, who became known as “the largest aggregation of famous comedians in the world.” This tight unit continued until mid-1913 when Fred Mace left to go out on his own and Sennett began limiting his appearances to concentrate on the administrative duties of his booming fun factory. In the ensuing years Mack would continue to build his stable of comedy performers, and bring together a number of comedy duos, but nothing matched the intensive teamwork of his early films.

In the meantime another comedy ensemble came together at Essanay's West Coast company. After the quick demise of “Hank and Lank” Victor Potel and Augustus Carney had remained in the studio's stock company, and became regulars in a series of western come-



Others Started, but Sophie Finished (Essanay 7/22/15). Back: Carrie Turpin, Harry Todd; Front: Ben Turpin, Victor Potel

Steve Rydzewski Collection

end, a rotund stage actor presented himself at the Vitagraph studio in Brooklyn looking for work. In a career that had encompassed 22 years, John Bunny had appeared in minstrel shows, circuses and vaudeville, and worked with legends like William Brady, Lew Fields and Raymond Hitchcock. Despite this long track record he had decided that movies were the coming thing and that he "would rather be behind the guns than in front of them." Bunny, who looked like Shakespeare's Falstaff and Sir Toby Belch come to life, made an immediate impression on moviegoers and became a favorite. In February of 1911 he first worked with Flora Finch and the combination of the expansive Bunny with the severe

Bunny proposes to her and things look dire, but the baby's nurse gets an idea when the governess is taking a nap and gives the kid a pair of scissors. With the governess' attractive hair chopped off, Bunny's ardor cools and she's sent packing.

Although physically filling the stereotype of the jolly fat man, it's rumored that Bunny was bad-tempered and egotistical, and, due to his extreme weight, narcoleptic, even able to snooze away in a complete standing position. In 1914, despite declining health, the comedian began doing double duty in films and on stage. Overwork, combined with kidney disease, caused his death on May 1st, 1915. Tributes eulogized Bunny around the world, predicting that he and his films would be cherished by future generations, but within only a few years the memory of him dimmed and most of the films disappeared.

The peak of Flora Finch's career was her years with Bunny; afterward she was never able to recapture the same popularity. Leaving Vitagraph in 1916, she set up the Flora Finch Film Corp. the following year and turned out a series of two-reelers which were coolly received by audiences and exhibitors. She returned to the supporting ranks, turning up in the live-action "Carrie of the Chorus" comedies made by Max and Dave Fleischer, and in high profile features such as *Quality Street* and *The Cat and the Canary* (both 1927). By the time sound arrived, outside of an occasional bit like her funny cameo at the opening of Laurel and Hardy's *Way Out West* (1937), she was mostly confined to anonymous extra work until her death in 1940.

In early polite comedy there are a number of forgotten combos. Before becoming "Queen of the Serials," Pearl White starred with Chester Barnett in a huge number of split-reel and one-reel comedies from 1912 to 1914. These were made by Crystal, a small company which released through Universal, and were written and directed by Phillips Smalley. At the same time Smalley and Crystal also produced the "Baldy" Belmont series. Joseph "Baldy" Belmont was a long-time stage veteran who often wore a toupee, and would frequently lose his flip top for comic effect. After supporting White and Barnett in a number of their comedies, Belmont was given his own series, which teamed him with Vivian Prescott, and ran in 1913 and 1914. From here "Baldy" took himself and his toupee over to Komic Comedies.

The longest lasting of these overlooked duos was Harry Myers and Rosemary Theby. Myers, chiefly remembered today as the drunken millionaire in Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931), made his stage debut in 1900 and spent ten years playing in stock companies and touring road shows. He entered films with the Lubin



A Cure for Pokertitis (Vitagraph 1912). John Bunny and Flora Finch
Museum of Modern Art

Finch created an instant combative chemistry (which may have been helped by the fact that they're said to have had an actual mutual dislike for each other). Finch was born in England in 1867 and began her career on stage. After coming to the U.S. she started working in films while trying to establish herself on the American stage. Starting at Biograph in 1908 she caught the attention of D.W. Griffith and made an impression in the "Jones Family" shorts and other comedies like *All on Account of the Milk* (1910). In 1910 she moved over to Vitagraph.

Although Bunny appeared in only a bit more than half of his total output of films with Ms. Finch, the "Bunnyfinches" were his most popular. The pair often played husband and wife, as in the famous *A Cure for Pokertitis* (1912) and *Polishing Up* (1914), but not always. In *Her Crowning Glory* (1911) Bunny plays a widower with a young daughter that he indulges, so she's growing up wild and spoiled. His sister (Kate Price) hires a governess to put some discipline into the household. The governess (Finch) turns out to be a scrawny, hatchet-faced tyrant, but Bunny is infatuated with her long, beautiful hair and she wraps him around her little finger.

tions on the doll. The woman has gotten off also and in a wonderful long shot, filmed from her point of view, we see Sidney throttle and tear the arms and legs off the doll (which really looks like he's murdering a baby). Aghast, she gets the police, but of course the misunderstanding is cleared up to provide the happy ending.

The immensely popular Drews left Vitagraph in 1916, continuing their film series for Metro and Paramount, and appeared together on stage. Sadly, Sidney Drew's health rapidly declined after the death of his son in World War I, and he died at the peak of his fame on April 9th, 1919. After a year off screen Mrs. Drew returned with shorts which she wrote, directed and starred in for Pathé, later directing the feature *Cousin Kate* (1921) before her own premature death on November 3rd, 1925.

A COUPLE OF "DUTCH" UNCLES

Returning to the slapstick couplings, a stage tradition that took root in silent comedy was that of "Dutch" comedians. Vaudeville made fun of every ethnic group in America and "Dutch" acts were parodies of German/Jewish immigrants, full of rough knockabout and dialogue which mangled the English language. Joe Weber and Lew Fields were the most famous stage practitioners, and despite the lack of sound it became popular on the screen. Ford Sterling is the best remembered with his characters of Chief Teheezal, Cohen, and Snookie. After Sterling came Max Asher, a former vaudeville magician and "Dutch" comic, who led the ensemble at Joker comedies. In 1913-1914 Asher was teamed with Harry McCoy for a series of "Mike and Jake" one-reelers. Titles like *Mike and Jake Among the Cannibals* (1913) and *Mike and Jake Close to Nature* (1914) suggest that the operating motif was sending the pair where they would be the most like fish out of water. Joker made about 15 of their adventures before McCoy moved over to Keystone, and although Bobby Vernon replaced him the series ended.

Weber and Fields themselves were soon lured to the screen. After a 1913 debut for Kinemacolor, the May 8th, 1915 *Motion Picture News* announced: "WEBER AND FIELDS STAR IN WORLD RELEASES. Famous Comedians Will Make Exclusive Appearance in Fifty-Two Releases - Have Begun in 'Two of the Finest.'"

Having made their stage debut together in 1877, they first tried other ethnic acts such as blackface and Irish before clicking as a "Dutch" act in the 1880s. They were wildly popular and opened their own theatre in 1896, producing hit shows like *Higgledy-Piggledy*. In 1904 they split up but came back together in 1912. The Weber and Fields comedies for World were shot on the

East Coast, as the company was based in Fort Lee, New Jersey. Survivors suggest that it was a sort of comedy serial where each one-reel installment followed the further misadventures of Mike and Meyer. One week they would be fighting in their grocery store, another week trying to keep their children from eloping, the next they were in jail for the damage they caused while trying to keep their children from eloping, and on and on.

It's hard to say how many World shorts they actually made, certainly not the 52 announced, as later that year the pair traveled out West to work for Mack Sennett. Harry Aitken, who had recently combined Sennett, D.W.



Joe Weber and Lew Fields as they appeared at the height of their popularity in vaudeville around 1900. Their film characters were decked out in clothing that was a little more ordinary in appearance.

Gale Johnson Collection

Griffith and Thomas Ince to form the Triangle Film Corp., decided that stage stars were needed to give Triangle films class. Despite a rumored salary of \$3,500 a week, Joe and Lew made only two starring shorts, *The Best of Enemies* (1915) and *The Worst of Friends* (1916). It was said the pair feared for their lives in the chaos on the Sennett lot. It seems they didn't care for filmmaking anyway and they went back to the stage, rarely appearing on film again.

“Waddy and Arty’ fun is blending of the snap of the slapstick – without the insane chase – the richness of real comedy and the spice of two minds that are clever in stage lore and funniness. ‘Waddy and Arty’s’ side-split-



The Midnight Prowlers (Vim Comedies-General Film Company 11/12/15). Walter Stull and Bobby Burns (Pokes and Jabs)

From “Laurel or Hardy” by Rob Stone

ting surprises get a laugh in any language. They do not need sub-titles to explain their humor – in fact, subtitles get in their way in the speed they ‘get them over’ in roars of haw-haws.”

The name of our next team, “Pokes and Jabs,” sums up the essence of their comedy. Bobby Burns came from vaudeville and musical comedy, where he played in *The Wizard of Oz* and *Babes in Toyland*. Walter Stull also graduated from the stage, where he had been a leading man in stock and melodramatic roadshows. Burns portrayed “Pokes” and Stull “Jabs,” but it’s impossible to tell them apart anyway in circulating titles like *Pluck and Luck* (1916) and *Play Ball* (1917). The two came together at Lubin and thrived like weeds, migrating to Reliance, Sterling, Wizard, Vim and Jaxon in a period of about four years, until Bobby Burns broke up the act in 1918. Stull soon dropped below the radar, but Burns moved over to Cuckoo Comedies, then Sun-Lite Comedies for Reelcraft to finish the decade. He remained active for many years, first as a writer and character player in Jack White Comedies during the ’20s, then as support in Hal Roach and Columbia shorts of the sound era.

An offshoot of “Pokes and Jabs” stay at Vim during 1915-16 were the “Plump and Runt” shorts, which starred Oliver Hardy and Billy Ruge. The characters began as support to Burns and Stull, but with *A Special Delivery* (1/27/16) they got their own one-reelers. Ruge had been half of the vaudeville team of Frobel and Ruge, and appeared in films for Lubin and Wizard. At this point

Babe Hardy had been in pictures for two years, first with Lubin, then freelancing for a while in New York with companies like Edison, Wharton, and little independents. “Plump and Runt” made about 30-plus shorts together, but never caught on as the characters were sometimes rivals and sometimes pals, and never really developed a screen relationship. Of course Hardy went on to better things, while Ruge moved over to the Jaxon Film Co. for some “Sparkle Comedies.” In the early ’20s he appeared in some “Funful Comedies” before disappearing from films.

All of the tiniest, independent companies were getting in the team game too. In 1916 the Emerald Motion Picture Corporation of Chicago put together a tall and short pair named “Tom and Jerry,” whose shorts were written and produced by Emerald’s president, Frederick J. Ireland. Emerald later lured Alice Howell and Billy West to Chicago, and was one of the concerns that merged to form Reelcraft. That same year vaudeville favorites Johnny and Emma Ray formed the Reserve Photoplays Co. in Cleveland, Ohio to make a few one-reelers chronicling their characters of “Casey and his wife.” A few years later Johnny Ray would enter more mainstream films by playing Jiggs in Al Christie’s short-lived adaptation of George McManus’ *Bringing Up Father*.

ON THE SENNETT LOT

Throughout the Teens, Mack Sennett reigned as the biggest name in film comedy. During the decade he put together various combos, with the most successful being the “Fatty and Mabel” series. Roscoe Arbuckle and Mabel Normand were already two of Sennett’s most popular stars and had worked together frequently since Arbuckle’s arrival on the lot in 1913. But with *Mabel and Fatty’s Wash Day* (1915), the teamwork became official and led to *Fatty and Mabel’s Simple Life*, *That Little*



Fatty and Mabel at the San Diego Exposition (Keystone-Mutual 1/23/15)

Steve Massa Collection

Slim Summerville, who appeared in Sennett comedies for five years, then in Fox comedies for a couple of years, has now become a star in his own right, and is to make a series of twelve two-reel comedies for a new organization of which Norman Manning is general manager. Bobbie Dunn, formerly a vaudeville and circus partner of Summerville's, will be chief support to the star, and Celesta Zimlick has been selected as leading lady. Joseph Bordeaux is directing. The comedies are being produced at the National Studios."

For the rest of the '20s both comics continued turning up in shorts and played support in features. Overall, Slim's career fared better, and sound gave it a shot in the arm. After his wonderful performance in *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), he starred in some talking shorts for Universal, but was generally a supporting player in "A" films and a star in "B's." Often teamed with ZaSu Pitts, he worked up to his death in 1946. Bobby declined to mostly bit roles, frequently at the Hal Roach Studio where he turns up in *Me and My Pal* (1933), *Tit for Tat* (1935) and *The Lucky Corner* (1936), before his death in 1937.

Sennett's other roughhouse pair of the late Teens was Ben Turpin and Charlie Lynn. First paired up in *Saucy Madeline* (1918), for a while they were rivals for the favors of Polly Moran's Sheriff Nell. But after Polly went to Fox the boys played buddies just trying to get by as inept actors, detectives, or just plain bums. Turpin

ent Vogue Films and ended up at Sennett in 1917.

Charlie Lynn is better known as Charles "Heinie" Conklin, who came to Sennett from Joker and dropped his last name for a while so as not to be confused with Chester Conklin. "Heinie" Conklin is a comedian that's very easy to take for granted. He's always around, but is never particularly funny. His career lasted a long time though, with bits in shorts and features up to 1958. After 1920 the boys went their separate ways, with Ben becoming one of the biggest comedy stars of the 1920s.

CLOWN PRINCES

Before the arrival of Laurel and Hardy, the most popular team in silent comedy was Eddie Lyons and Lee Moran. Over about six years they made a staggering number of films together, but since very few circulate today they've been almost completely forgotten and overlooked. Their shorts were more situational than slapstick, with the boys frequently playing buddies in hot water with their wives. Eddie Lyons looked like the boy next door, while Lee Moran was goofier – tall and gangly. Often Lyons would play the straight man with Moran



Maid Wanted (Universal 11/18/18). Lionel Belmore, Lee Moran, Dorothy Devore, Eddie Lyons, unidentified

Cole Johnson Collection

supplying the character comedy, as in *House Cleaning Horrors* (9/1/18), where newlyweds Eddie and Dorothy Devore hire inept handyman Lee to repaper and paint their love nest with, of course, disastrous results.

They both came from a stage background of vaudeville and musical comedy. Lyons hit the movies first in 1911 at the Biograph Studio in New York, then joined Imp, which led him to David Horsley's Nestor company. Al Christie was in charge of Nestor's comedies, and Moran debuted there in 1912. The pair first



Hide and Seek Detectives (Sennett-Paramount 12/15/18). Ben Turpin, Marie Prevost and Charlie Lynn ("Heinie" Conklin)

Steve Rydzewski Collection

made his film debut at Essanay in 1907, after many years knocking around on the stage. Chaplin brought him to the fore by using him in *His New Job* and *A Night Out* (both 1915). In 1916 he starred in comedies for the independ-

until Griffith hired her full time in 1914. Soon he left Biograph to join Harry Aitken's Reliance/Majestic organization. Loos went along and, among other things, wrote scripts for the Komic Comedy one-reelers with Fay Tincher, Tod Browning, etc. When the company became Fine Arts and part of Triangle in 1915, Anita met a Broadway actor who was just arrived as part of the theatre stars acquired by Harry Aitken. John Emerson had worked for the Shuberts and Charles Frohman and had been hired to act in and direct dramas. The pair first collaborated on Douglas Fairbanks' *His Picture in the Papers* (1916), and its breezy and satiric tone was perfect for Fairbanks' tongue-in-cheek personality. After working separately for a while – Loos writing the titles for *Intolerance* (1916) and the stories for Fay Tincher's Triangle two-reelers, Emerson directing dramas like *Macbeth* (1916) with Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree – they were finally cemented as a team for Fairbanks with *The Americano* (1916). In 1917 the pair moved with Doug over to Artcraft/Paramount for four more films, which included *In Again, Out Again* and *Wild and Woolly*. In 1918 the company gave them their own production unit and ballyhooed: "The names 'John Emerson and Anita Loos' mean a great deal to exhibitor and to motion picture patron. Their new productions will be eagerly sought, for rare indeed is the exhibitor who hasn't been asked, 'When will you show another of those John Emerson-Anita Loos pictures – the ones with the funny stunts and the gingery sub-titles?'"

During this time they made comedies starring Shirley Mason, and developed scripts for Marion Davies, Ernest Truex and Fred Stone. In 1919 they married and began writing for Constance Talmadge, a collaboration that created a dozen comedy features and lasted to 1925. Sadly, almost all of these films have been lost, leaving Talmadge's career overlooked and Emerson and Loos' silent film reputation resting on their Fairbanks titles. In 1928 they adapted Anita's book *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* into a film, and in the 1930s worked at MGM on films such as *The Girl from Missouri* (1934) and *San Francisco* (1936). Emerson died in 1956, and Loos kept writing, producing a number of memoirs about her time in Hollywood right up to her death in 1981.

Another unusual pairing was the popular kiddie team of sisters Jane and Katherine Lee. After supporting Annette Kellerman in *A Daughter of the Gods* (1916) and doing a number of Fox features with Theda Bara and Stuart Holmes, the studio put them into their own features such as *Two Little Imps* (1917) and *Swat the Spy* (1918). Some were helmed by comedy veteran Arvid E. Gillstrom, and most had topical World War I themes that consisted of the moppets shaming their elders into doing

their civic wartime duty.

In the early 1920s the sisters physically left films for vaudeville, but, according to *Moving Picture World*, Fox brought them back in 1922 "in re-edited versions of some of their former successes. The pictures have been edited by Ralph Spence and cut down to two reels. The first of the series is called *A Pair of Aces*, and is made up of situations and bits of business culled from several of the original features." Both girls retired from show business by the mid-1930s.

But the oddest couple of silent comedy has to be the simian sidekicks Napoleon and Sally. Their one-reelers were made by the E. & R. Jungle Film Company, which had been formed in 1914 by J.S. Edwards and John Rounan. Napoleon had originally appeared on stages



around the world with another chimp named Hip. After Hip died, the May 8th, 1915 *Motion Picture News* announced:

"SALLY, E. & R. STAR, RIVALS NAPOLEON IN COMEDY. Napoleon, the chimpanzee comedy star, just returned from a successful engagement in Australia

making, the November 16th, 1918 Moving Picture World reported: "DE HAVEN TO ASSIST CHAPLIN. Charles Chaplin has engaged Carter De Haven to assist him in directing a new comedy for the First National Exhibitors that was begun at the Chaplin studios the week of October 21."

He can also be seen in Kevin Brownlow and David Gill's *Unknown Chaplin* (1983) in footage of Chaplin and his crew making an impromptu film with the Prince of Denmark on the sets of *Sunnyside* (1919). After his career wound down De Haven continued working with Chaplin, receiving assistant director credit on *Modern Times* (1936) and appearing as Jack Oakie's ambassador in *The Great Dictator* (1940). De Haven died on July 7th, 1977 at the ripe age of 90.

The last team to be discussed in the first part of this article, and owing to the disappearance of their films also the least seen, is that of Earl Montgomery and Joe Rock. From 1917 into 1920 they starred in wild, action comedy one- and two-reelers for Vitagraph, chock-full of chases and daredevil stunts. Joe Rock said: "We always finished our comedies with a shot of us running away from a cop, a schoolteacher, or a principal, and then running smack into them again. If we'd run away from cops, we'd run back into cops. Then we'd break away, climb a roof, and fall through a skylight, look up, see the cops, and smile. We'd turn around and discover that we were behind bars in jail. The kids used to love it. Everything we did was with an eye to them. I played the young boob; Montgomery was the heavy."

Rock was born Joseph Simberg in New York in 1891. With a background in sports, athletics and dancing, Joe reported to the Vitagraph studio after hearing that they needed people who could do stunts. Promptly hired, he began working in the shorts that Larry Semon was

directing with Hughie Mack and Jimmy Aubrey. There he met Earl Montgomery. Today there's scant information available about Montgomery, making him something of a man of mystery. He was born in California in 1894, and according to Rock had done some stunt work for the American Film Co. before coming East to Vitagraph.

Montgomery and Rock can be spotted tearing up the scenery as part of the "Big V Riot Squad" in shorts

like *Hash and Havoc* (1916), *Worries and Wobbles*, and *Plagues and Puppy Love* (both 1917). During this time they formed a partnership, and decided: "You do stunts. I do stunts. Let's not double for anybody else." They wrote some sample scripts, which were liked by Vitagraph head Albert E. Smith, and were on their way in one-reelers. The total unavailability of their films is a real shame, as titles like *Sneakers and*



A furry Eddie Baker swears in Montgomery and Rock – possibly from *Caves and Goquettes* (Vitagraph 1919)

Steve Massa Collection

Snoozers and Subs and Dubs (both 1918) sound like non-stop gag fests. Joe and Monty wrote the scripts; J.A. Howe, Roy H. McCray and Gilbert Pratt were their directors; and surviving photos and lobby cards show that "Queen of the Amazons" Blanche Payson was a regular foil for their antics. In August of 1918 all the "Big V" comedies became two reels, and the boys continued together until mid-1920.

At this point Vitagraph got greedy and split them, thinking that they'd then have two successful series for their one. But things didn't work out as well, and although each got their own unit with talented collaborators – Chuck Reisner directed Monty, and Rock had Grover Jones – they soon moved on. Rock went on to starring comedies for Federated and Grand-Asher. He had always handled the business for the team, and now expanded into producing shorts with comics like Stan Laurel, Jimmy Aubrey, Alice Ardell and A Ton of Fun. Montgomery continued on, doing a series for Carnival Comedies, in addition to appearing in and writing gags

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Tease your brains with these mystery stills straight from the bowels of silent comedy hell, or, in this case, Levittown, Pennsylvania. Send your best guess, deduction or hair-brained theory to the editors, who will secretly laugh at you and chuck your letter in the trash.



Cole Johnson Collection



Cole Johnson Collection

Early in 1914 Ford Sterling took what would turn out to be an ill-advised hiatus from Keystone. By the end of 1913 and beginning of 1914 Sterling's workload was enormous: he was writing, directing and starring in his own films for Keystone. Sometimes he was making multiple pictures, running between sets to shoot scenes requiring close enough shots that a stand-in simply wouldn't do. A section of the release schedule for this period demonstrates quite nicely the sort of pressure Sterling was under. For example, at the turn of 1914 he was directing and acting in *Double Crossed*, which had been booked for a January 26th release, in production for *Baffles*, *Gentleman Burglar* due to be released February 16th; directing *A Thief Catcher*, which was promised for three days after *Baffles*, and acting in *A Robust Romeo*, which was released on February 12th.

With this sort of output expected from its comedians it is not surprising Keystone was running behind schedule with its product. This was made clear to Sennett in one of a series of telegrams and night letters sent from the powers that be, Charles Kessel of the New York Motion Picture Company, which not only owned the controlling majority of the Keystone Studio shares but also acted as the holding house for the Keystone films, releasing the films through an alliance with the Mutual Film Corporation. Kessel wrote specifically about *Baffles* on January 13th, requesting a completion date, which apparently was not forthcoming. By January 26th he was getting impatient. Another wire ordered *Baffles* to be sent to the N.Y.M.P. Co. as soon as possible and, as it was, it would be released in regular two-reel form. Perhaps Sennett was trying to push two-reelers when Mutual had been insisting on singles because the telegram went on to say Mutual would "absolutely refuse to take any more two reelers." And that proved to be the last Keystone two-reeler for a while. The N.Y.M.P. Co. was also getting impatient waiting for delivery of Sterling's *Double Crossed*. In a January 13th telegram, Kessel was asking why they hadn't received the negative yet as it was booked for release on January 26th. With Sennett being hassled from New York about the lateness of two of the four shorts Ford was working on, the urgency was probably passed down the line to his overworked star who, under the circumstances, may not have been all that impressed.

It seems Sterling considered he deserved more for his pains than his current weekly salary, reputed by various sources to be an unlikely \$250. At the time the public hailed Sterling not only as Keystone's but as one of America's most popular comedians. With the type of workload and pressure that was being put on him it was no wonder Sterling might have been asking for a pay rise. Sennett and the N.Y.M.P. Co., though, were known for paying their comedians and crew somewhat poorly compared to other studios. It was not only the comedians who were leaving to make their fortunes, or at least better pay elsewhere: writers, directors and crew went too.

The reason for Sterling leaving Keystone has been documented in various articles and books by both early writers and modern authors. The stories come from two main sources and they conflict with each other, primary sources and records. Could reminiscences of Mack Sennett and Fred Balshofer, with their varied recollections, have

been the premises for rumors that Sterling was difficult to work with, unprofessional, spoilt and greedy? Did he really ask for a raise or did Fred Balshofer try to poach him from Keystone first and then Sterling asked Sennett to better the offer? Or was there another scenario? One thing is clear: Sterling left Sennett to make comedies which were to be released by Universal. Other than that it is into hazy territory, distant memories, egos and ax grinding – and one piece of evidence that throws a rather large monkey wrench into the works.

In some sources Sterling was asking for what he considered an appropriate remuneration, three times his present salary of \$250 – very high considering it was way above the accepted expectations and earning power of major stars in "legitimate" features. Even two years later in October 1915, Karl K. Kitchen wrote in *Photoplay* magazine that, with the exception of Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin and possibly Marguerite Clarke, there was no film star in America who received more than \$750 a week as salary. He states Mabel Normand at Keystone received \$500 and John Bunny was never paid more than that at Vitagraph. The same magazine carried an article less than six months after Kitchen's showing an astronomic jump in stars' pay. Salaries of \$1,000 were common and Keystone was paying some of its comedians more than \$2,000 per week. But that was not the same Keystone as the one Kessel and Bauman controlled in 1913. If Sterling's outlandish \$750 per week request was true it is no wonder Sennett claims he balked. Sennett could not authorize this sort of expenditure; he would have been forced to put it in the hands of Kessel and Bauman, who controlled the Keystone purse strings. This he claims he did and when they got the request Kessel and Bauman reputedly stalled for a while then offered Sterling an extra \$100 per week.

Story number two, which is a Mack Sennett version, tells of Sterling going to see him to say he's quitting. Sterling's salary is still \$250 a week but he has already made *Dirty Work in a Laundry*, which was not released until July 1915 after Sterling's return to Keystone. Could Sennett have been confusing the first two times Sterling left the studio? If he was then this would have been in 1915, at a time when twice Sterling's reported salary of \$250 would have given him parity with Mabel and John Bunny and triple would have made him the highest paid comedian on the lot. That would have been more understandable, but this was still 1913.

Now here is a variation: Sennett also says he knew Sterling wanted more money and was unhappy at Keystone so it is he who offered Ford a rise to \$400 per week, thinking that would shock Ford into staying with Keystone. It didn't so Sennett offered to keep raising Ford's salary until "he would need stevedores to carry it home in bales." When Sterling asked Sennett what this raise would entail he was told he would be given an iron-clad contract, no options, and \$750 a week. Here's the \$750 again, and wasn't that a problem? Sennett couldn't sanction that sort of raise without Kessel and Bauman's okay.

Story number three is yet another Sennett version. In the summer of 1913 Sennett still had Sterling under another six months at the salary of \$200 a week but there

ly have been astute enough to realize this, which poses a question: Why would Sennett have had Chaplin impersonate Sterling in *Mabel at the Wheel*, made shortly after Sterling left the studio? It is more likely he would have pushed Chaplin and his little tramp character forward as his new star and dropped anything Sterling. Why would Ford find Charlie a specific threat when this was occurring at the Keystone Studio, which he was considering leaving anyway? Sterling had no such difficulties with any of the other comedians on the lot, some of whom, like Roscoe Arbuckle, had the potential of becoming far bigger stars than Ford; it was not as if he was the only leading player in Keystone Comedies either. Obviously there were problems between Sterling, Sennett and Keystone but these would not prove to be insurmountable or filled with animosity as Sterling came back.

Where does this put the various tales of Sennett imploring Sterling to stay with Keystone? If the former were true then the latter surely would not have taken place as well. Sennett did say that Sterling and Lehrman were in cahoots and looking to start a company of their own. Lehrman's beef was not so much pay (although he didn't object to a pay rise), but more lack of billing and acknowledgment for the work he did for the company: everything, he said, was "Mack Sennett." With that and the comment Ford made to Sennett – "I ought to be worth at least that much to myself. I'm quitting and going into business on my own" – we are getting nearer the truth than most of the stories surrounding events.

In May 1914 the incorporation papers submitted in the February for The Sterling Motion Picture Corporation completed their trip through the appropriate offices and bureaucracies and became official. What makes Balshofer's future claims of autonomy very suspect is that the incorporators listed were Fred J. Balshofer, George F.S. Stich and Henry M. Lehrman. Sterling had to revert to his given name for legal purposes as he never officially changed it. The capital stock at the time was \$10,000 with a subscribed stock of \$300. These official documents put a whole new slant on Balshofer's claims of sole ownership, total control and of certain actions he claimed he was able to take on the presumption it was his company. And this is what his memoirs concerning events at the Sterling Studio are based on. Balshofer conveniently forgot he initially had partners once they were both deceased.

There is another player in the scenario, head of Universal Carl Laemmle, and his connection with Sterling's exit from Keystone. Surprisingly there is more than one version to this too! When talk of Sterling's initial discontent with Keystone started to surface, it was made known to Sterling that Laemmle would be interested in financing a separate company with Sterling as the star. This would pay Ford not only a salary but a share of the film's profits as well. That sounds as if Laemmle were suggesting Sterling would own at least part of the studio. It was also a guaran-

tee that Universal would release all the one- and two-reelers made by the new studio. If Laemmle had courted Sterling, as has been speculated, it happened in the October of 1913, but this could just have easily been an offer made on Laemmle's behalf by Fred Balshofer – he was the one apparently setting up the deal.

The alternate Sennett version of this takes place in the summer of 1914 and not 1913 but is otherwise initially accurate if you ignore Lehrman's employment status; he was still with Sennett. Sennett said that Sterling teamed up with Lehrman, who had already quit Keystone, and with Fred Balshofer, a pioneering picture executive who had worked with Kessel and Bauman and formed a company of their own. Sennett says trouble began between Sterling and Lehrman before the studio even had a name, with Lehrman insisting Ford was not to call the studio "The Sterling Motion Picture Company" because he was of German descent, and the First World War having just started, this might alienate the anti-German customers. Okay, Stich or Lehrman even might have sounded German, but Sterling?

Then Lehrman demanded Ford stop playing German roles. Ford's answer was that over the previous two years he had established himself as a Dutch comedian and he was not giving up the character now. It would be pretty silly for Sterling to change, or be expected to change, his then beloved character with its popularity and box office draw. So what we have in this tale is the director telling the popular star, a man called Sterling who plays a Dutch



Yankee Doodle in Berlin (Sennett-Lesser 3/20/19). As the Kaiser
Cole Johnson Collection

ing his name, a chance to break from Keystone and the restraints the company imposed, or to have some control over the company he was working for, he took the plunge. As for the freedom to make his own films, he seems to have pretty much had that at Keystone already – the style didn't change.

What is irrefutable is that Ford Sterling took up Balshofer's offer and, after co-directing *Across the Hall* with Sennett, released on March 23rd, 1914 (after Sterling had left the company), said farewell to Keystone and moved over to Universal. He formed a partnership with Pathé Lehrman and Fred Balshofer and the three of them incorporated The Sterling Motion Picture Company.

Unfortunately, like Fred Mace before him, the move spelt disaster for Sterling. Balshofer claimed in his book that in February 1914 the Sterling Film Company was incorporated with himself as sole owner and a guaranteed distribution through a major company, Universal. He stated that he had the freedom to make any decisions he wanted without having to consult a partner. He seems to have been in for a surprise – they may have been silent comedians, but Sterling and Lehrman don't appear to have been silent partners.

For the Sterling Studio, Balshofer said he bought the vacant Nestor studio from David Horsley for the sum of \$11,000. The buildings were used as offices, dressing rooms and a processing laboratory; the activities of daily movie making took place on the open studio at the back. The Nestor studio had originally been Old Blondeau's Tavern, situated at the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Gower Street, but by the time Balshofer was interested in it, it didn't belong to David Horsley any more. He must have forgotten that Horsley no longer owned the studio, and Horsley would have been quite surprised if he had received \$11,000 from Balshofer. The studio had been taken over in 1912 by

Carl Laemmle as part of the Universal Manufacturing Company so that Universal could start production on the West Coast. It would seem natural for the new company to use the Nestor studio if they were making movies to be released through Universal.

On the face of it the Sterling-Lehrman teaming looked promising: they had regularly worked together at Keystone, producing good work, and there was a chemistry between the two men on screen. For the new company Sterling adopted "Snookee" for the name for his "Dutch" character and his Keystone Kop became Sergeant Hofmeyer. Emma Clifton and Peggy Pearce filled in the female roles and Lehrman acted as well as directed. The studio's output of Sterling vehicles was initially quite prolific, with six one-reelers and one two-reeler released within the first two months.

The date of Sterling's actual departure from Keystone and the start of his tenure with Sterling Comedies is a little vague. The second reel of the first Sterling film, *Love and Vengeance* (1914), was built round the Grand Prix auto races and Vanderbilt Cup held at Santa Monica between February 26th and 28th, 1914. Sterling had obviously left Keystone before this date, maybe by a couple of weeks if the first reel was shot prior to the races. With the April 23rd release date the studio still would have had time to shoot the reels in reverse order had he left at the end of February.

Ironically, Mabel Normand was also filming at the race track; she was directing *Mabel at the Wheel* (1914), a film in which Charles Chaplin impersonated Ford Sterling as per Sennett's instructions. In the first reel of *Love and Vengeance*, Lehrman again plays Sterling's nemesis; maybe it was a jibe at Chaplin playing Ford in Mabel's film but he is impersonating Charlie. This is almost certainly the first Chaplin impersonation on film. The new company's first



Site of the Sterling Studio. The Nestor Studio property bought by Fred Balshofer was located at the corner of Sunset and Gower. The photo above depicts the studio as it appeared around 1917 when occupied by the Christie Film Company. By the time this photo was taken ownership of the property had changed hands several times and Christie was then renting the studio from Quality Pictures Corporation. Al Christie later purchased the site and remained there until his company went into receivership in 1933. Today the site is occupied by CBS's Columbia Square (inset).

Images shamelessly lifted from the internet

Although *Moving Picture World* did not find this offering as amusing as *The Crash*, they certainly didn't slate it: "The master of the house, tired of the monkey and parrot kept by his wife, puts one in the pantry and the other down the well. The parrot's cries for help rouse the neighborhood. There are no extremely laughable places in this but it is lightly amusing throughout."

A report, which could be construed as odd, might indicate that there was some sort of problem at the studio in July. The article informs the public that: "The Sterling Studio is guarded like a jail by a burly policeman at the gate who turns away the applicants for extra work." That in itself might be worth reporting as it could intimate the studio was not employing the extras it previously had. But, the reporter went on to tell us that he had gone to the studio again later that week, taking a camera with him. This time another policeman was on guard and when his eagle eye lit on the camera he refused to allow the reporter in. The reporter claimed that "no amount of explanation would do, so a message [was] sent through a screened window of Fred Balshofer's office, which brought him out in a hurry and the zealous representative of justice was made to 'see.' After that he has been as nice as pie." This all seems a little peculiar, especially as it goes on to say that "at no studio do they let visitors bring cameras in." If this rule was the norm, what made it newsworthy in this instance unless there was something going on that merited reporting? Maybe nothing, just an over-eager reporter looking for a story.

It was noted by both Sennett and Balshofer that Sterling became increasingly argumentative with Lehrman and unreliable in his appearances on the set. Ford was supposedly working his schedule around his social plans rather than the studio's requirements. His output throughout the first six months at the studio does not support this as he was making a short on an average of every one or two weeks. That would indicate if films were being made and released by Sterling throughout this time then it is a strong probability he was turning up at the studio regularly and for a decent amount of time. The studio hadn't been in business long enough for there to be sufficient material to make this quantity of varied films from out-takes while Ford frolicked.

That there were difficulties between Sterling and

Lehrman toward the end of their tenure seems pretty certain if Sennett and Balshofer are to be believed, but again the facts are hazy and conflicting. Maybe it was between Lehrman and Balshofer, and Sterling and Balshofer, that the real conflict lay. There could be some accuracy in Sennett's biographies surrounding the making of *Hearts and Swords*, the sixth one-reeler made by Sterling's new company, released in May 1914. Sennett tells it that Lehrman was directing *Hearts and Swords* and it was facing financial problems. If an extra day of shooting was required the profits would be jeopardized. Lehrman was said to have made a

seven o'clock call but Sterling didn't show up until noon, looking exhausted. Lehrman was furious and threatened to quit. Sterling and Balshofer decided they could do without him so Balshofer fired Lehrman. Were they fighting and firing or being paid bonuses and what about the partnership? Yes, Balshofer and Sterling together could have outvoted Lehrman and insisted he didn't work at the studio but he would still remain a partner.

It is likely Lehrman did leave around this time as there are no other directing credits listed for him for the Sterling Studio after *Hearts and Swords* and a new director was brought in too. *Moving Picture World* notes in the June 27th issue that George Nichols, formerly of Keystone, was to start directing the next week. It is quite possible that Balshofer, Sterling or both bought out Lehrman because Lehrman was off doing his own thing. Balshofer again has a different slant on matters than Sennett. He says that everything had gone so rosy that four months after they started shooting the first picture (which would have been around mid-

June), he declared a dividend, with Sterling getting \$1,200 and Lehrman getting \$1,000. This presumably was their share of the profits rather than a "gift" from Balshofer.

According to Balshofer, both men promptly let the cash go to their heads. Sterling went off to Charles Levi and Sons, one of the best tailors in town, and ordered several suits and topcoats and as soon as they were ready requested a couple of weeks off to go to New York. Once there he booked in at the Astor Hotel, taking everyone he knew in New York up to his room to show them his wardrobe. Lehrman stayed home, spending his money and nights at Baron Long's Vernon Country Club. Sterling returned to the fold after three weeks, flat broke; Lehrman was in a similar financial situation when he returned too. Perhaps Lehrman



Paul "Little Billy" Jacobs, who appeared with Sterling in *Sergeant Hoffmeyer*. It is probable that Jacobs appeared with Sterling in additional shorts in the Sterling-Universal series.

Steve Massa Collection

Sterling continued seriously ill, and his condition has caused his wife and mother considerable concern." Balshofer says someone tipped him off to this mysterious illness of Sterling's. He was spending his nights at Baron Long's Night Club whooping it up – no wonder his wife, Teddy Sampson, and his mother were worried. Teddy and Ford hadn't been married that long. That is of course presuming Teddy and Ford weren't at Baron Long's together – if so, then why would she have been worried? *Moving Picture World* did have a medical diagnosis in their report on the first annual ball held by the Screen Club of San Francisco. They said Sterling was absent from the festivities because he had been taken ill with pneumonia. This is something he was prone to throughout his life.

Balshofer decided Sterling would have to go. Like Lehrman's departure, did Ford sell his holdings in the studio of his own volition or did Balshofer make it so difficult for Sterling to have any connection with the company that he felt obliged to cut his ties? This would be at the risk of Balshofer losing his contract with Universal if that part of his contract with them was true. Balshofer claims there was enough material for the company to run into early 1915, long after Sterling had "been let go." Snookee shorts continued to be released, he says, using the unused scenes and cut-outs stored in the vaults and with George Jeske filling in for Sterling when needed. Until one of these shorts shows up, we'll probably never know. Sterling was not listed as being in any of the company's releases after *Secret Service Snitz*, with the exception of *His Smashing Career*, released in April 1915, a good three months after his return to Sennett. Either it had been shelved, was a re-release under a different title, or it was one of Balshofer's compilations.

Ford seems to have kept up a front that all was well at the studio, which would intimate that he wanted the venture to work. But then he never, in print, said a bad word about anyone. In December of 1914 an interview with Sterling was published in *Moving Picture Magazine*. It seems a very optimistic little story, but there is no saying when the interview was given. Sterling speaks of having his own company and making great plans for the future, which he hopes will appeal to the audience. What dates this interview as being pre-December is that he was apparently not married at the time and was happily indulging in one of his hobbies, gardening. He is also still living with his mother in a bungalow in Venice, California and the interviewer does state: "There was no Mrs. Ford Sterling when she saw him, but who knew what had happened since."

Everything was all over bar the shouting by the time the article reached the presses. Although shorts were still being released by the studio until August of 1915 without Sterling, on January 23rd, 1915 *Moving Picture World* reported that "The Sterling Company had ceased production, Ford Sterling had severed his connections with it and all the employees given two weeks' notice." Ford Sterling had severed his connections with it? A somewhat different story from Balshofer's firing him. Neither have there been any reports that Sterling was spotted in nightclubs while he was supposed to be working, only that he was ill.

Had Sterling been the temperamental comedian Balshofer made him out to be, wouldn't this have made

other studios think twice about employing someone so difficult and unreliable? The studios certainly weren't put off: Sterling continued working and made a million before he briefly retired to travel the world. And next he was back with Sennett, no less; his workload was full. There is little real evidence that Sterling was difficult, moody and unreliable to work with. Balshofer had an ax to grind and Ford was not the only artist to fall foul of his viperous tongue.

Lehrman and Sennett were not the only people to habitually reuse Sterling in their productions either. Later in his career Mal St. Clair, Robert North, B.P. Schulberg, Nat Levine, Marshall Neilan and John Francis Dillon all used him multiple times. Surely they were not all masochists looking for a difficult and expensive time with their actors. Neither were they charity workers handing out jobs to a poor, unemployable has-been.

Sterling was also used and contracted by several studios over again: Universal, First National, Goldwyn and MGM, Columbia, Famous Players, Fox, and Paramount. Sterling wasn't a big enough star for them to tolerate tantrums from him.

Singer and actress June MacCloy worked with Sterling in the Educational short *Foolish Forties* in 1931. She remembers him as being charming, sophisticated, professional, and a gentleman. When it was suggested he could be awkward and difficult to work with she was appalled at the thought. "Absolutely not, he was charming and a pro." Even Chaplin singled out, as he put it "the great Ford Sterling" as being immensely popular with the public and with everyone at the studio, they would surround his set and laugh at him eagerly."

After leaving the company, Sterling was able to purchase his first house for himself and his new wife so the venture certainly hadn't bankrupted him. It makes one wonder how successful the studio would have been without its rather messy demise.

STERLING COMEDIES FILMOGRAPHY

(Sterling's output only)

Love and Vengeance (4/23/14)

d. Henry Lehrman
w. Ford Sterling, Henry Lehrman, Emma Clifton

The Fatal Wedding (4/30/14)

d. Henry Lehrman
w. Ford Sterling

Sergeant Hofmeyer (5/7/14)

d. Henry Lehrman
w. Ford Sterling, Billy Jacobs

Papa's Boy (5/14/14)

d. Henry Lehrman
w. Ford Sterling, Billy Jacobs

Hearts and Swords (5/28/14)

d. Henry Lehrman
w. Ford Sterling, Peggy Pearce

Snitz Joins the Force (6/4/14)

d. Balshofer?
w. Ford Sterling

When Smaltz Loves (6/11/14)

d. Balshofer?
w. Ford Sterling



His Pride and Shame (Keystone-Triangle 2/18/16). Bobby Vernon and Juanita Hansen embrace as an irate Ford Sterling looks on.

Steve Rydzewski Collection

WHERE THE CRANKS TURNED

Wharton Brothers, Inc.

1913 - 1920

Pictured to the right is the original studio facility of the Wharton Brothers film company as it looked in the summer of 2000. The building is located in Ithaca, New York and now serves as a boathouse within a public park. For several weeks in 1915, however, it was the workplace of Oliver Hardy, who is known to have appeared in four installments of the comedy serial *New Adventures of J. Rufus Wallingford* and at least one feature, *The Lottery Man*.



Regrettably, no photo credit is available

Love and Bullets (Keystone 7/4/14). A great satire on films and melodramatic acting. This was a great early role for Edgar Kennedy and went over very well with the audience.

An Ariel Joyride (Fox 5/12/17). Many in the audience were surprised to see Raymond Griffith in a Fox comedy along with James Parrott. Ray was a long way from his dapper character, but he was no less funny with his fundament aflame, bouncing up and down on it on the sidewalk.

Madame Dynamite (Fox 11/28/26). Alice Howell's last known performance on film and with bobbed hair no less! Alice did a great job in this film. Why she would ever retire is a wonder and a loss to all classic comedy fans.

The Scholar (King Bee 3/15/18). While a Billy West comedy with Babe Hardy is always good to look at, this recently discovered comedy had none other than Edgar Kennedy in two roles and Blanche Payson dominating Edgar in both of them.

Their First Mistake (Roach/MGM 11/5/32). This Laurel and Hardy short looked better than any other 16mm print I have seen, with the added bonus of a short insert of Stan Laurel's

address not seen in any previous 16mm prints. It's not much in the scheme of things, but to Laurel and Hardy film collectors it was like seeing a lost Da Vinci.

Dumbbells in Derbies (Darmour 2/7/31). The pre-viewing hype to this was that it was the worst comedy short ever made, with maybe the worst comedy team in the talkie era — Dane and Arthur.

What made this film worth watching was all of the classic comedy stalwarts interspersed throughout, like Harry Bowen, Charlie Hall, and Frank Alexander.

Funny Manns: Employees' Christmas Reel, circa 1963. This film consisted of the first reel of the Ton o' Fun's *Honeymoon Feet* (Standard Cinema-F.B.O. 5/18/26) with risqué narration. This was made to be seen by the staff of Funny Manns only. Even though this was a skewering of a film we should have watched in its original state, the audi-

ence laughed like crazy, with a couple of people losing it.

Another rewarding experience was Mark Johnson's presentation of his wonderful collection of promotional slides. Promotional slides don't do a lot for people who have to hold them up to the light in their fingers to view them. However, when you project these slides on a screen, they become breathtaking. While Mark was showing the slides, there were lots of "oohs" and "ahs" from the audience like they were watching a fireworks show. With Mark's large collection and the last Slapsticon audience reaction, these slide showings should be a Slapsticon institution.

In attendance was Paul Gierucki of Laughsmith Entertainment. Paul is producing THE Roscoe Arbuckle DVD, due out in April 2005, with broadcasts on Turner Classic Movies the same month. Paul was kind enough to bring some of the material he's putting on the disc. The top- per of the films he had shown in the ballroom was Lloyd Hamilton's *The Movies* (Educational 10/4/25), which was directed by Arbuckle. Many had only seen clips from this film in Robert Youngson's *Four Clowns* (1969). The original print had shrunk so much that it could not be projected

on a telecine. Paul painstakingly copied each frame and reassembled them. The film was well received by the audience.

On Friday, July 9th, all the Slapsticonians herded themselves on a bus to the town of Wellesley. We arrived at Babson College's Knight Auditorium for an evening's showing of Hal Roach silent comedies. Ensnared within the auditorium is a



Slap 2 attendees gather on stage at the Coolidge Theater in Brookline, Massachusetts at the close of the four-day event.

Photo by Jeni Rymer

Wurlitzer organ, lovingly maintained by the Eastern Massachusetts Chapter of the American Theater Organ Society. A recording of Wurlitzer organ accompaniment does it no justice. To hear a Wurlitzer live while watching silents is a moving experience, so no one should ever miss an opportunity to do so. Besides Ben Model, Juan Cardona also piloted the Wurlitzer and his treatment of Our Gang's *Saturday's Lesson* (Roach-MGM 11/9/29) turned it into a laugh riot.

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"I'm broke" says "Fatty" Arbuckle



FROM LIFE
HOLLYWOOD, CAL.

LEONARD
WHITNEY-

An interview with the dethroned
king of feature comedies

by Constance Palmer

There's another story going the rounds about Roscoe Arbuckle. In the last decade there has not been a more sensationally written of figure in American life than Arbuckle. Since that fatal day in September, 1921, he has been the butt of more widespread slander and the victim of more nefarious publicity than any other inhabitant of these free United States. Were he to stub his toe on a rusty nail, it would be - according to the papers - with a deadly, ulterior motive.

The latest story is that he is directing Buster Keaton. The noble citizens wag their heads and imply the worst.

So ye humble scribe hotfooted



*The new Roscoe Arbuckle, silent,
brooding, but not bitter.*

over to the Keaton studio to get the whole terrible tale.

The day was hot and so was I. It was my deep hope that I get a simple, direct story of high and low finance, grand and petit larceny. After that - home, and a welcome cold shower.

Several cars loaded with studio impedimenta were starting off on location. Camera legs stuck out at dangerous angles on all sides, trucks were being loaded with lights, flats, chairs, props. In the midst of all this - and seemingly incidentally - perspiring actors and technicians were wedged.

My temper was deranged when I realized that I had probably missed my victim. I peered into all the cars - but Keaton and Arbuckle were nowhere to be seen. I quite naturally supposed they had gone ahead in their

own machines.

The studio itself looked deserted. The only sign of life was a woolly and whiskered dog tied to a post. He was making dispirited passes at flies.

By and by I succeeded in raising an important official of the Joseph M. Schenck Company, the producers not only of the Keaton Comedies, but of the Norma and Constance Talmadge features.

The official was almost as hot and sticky as I was and nearly as cross. But when I told him my errand, he was six times hotter and eight times crosser.

"But I heard that Roscoe was directing Buster," I protested.

"Then you heard wrong," he replied briefly. "Didn't you see the Keaton Company starting off for loc-

(Continued on page 51)



*There's time to be spent in cleaning
one's car.*

I'm Broke Says Arbuckle, Cont'd.

ation just now?"

"Yes, I did," I answered hopefully.

"Did you see Arbuckle with 'em?"

"Nope."

"Know why you didn't?"

"Nope."

"Cause he's right here."

I looked around and there came Roscoe himself. It was good to see him again. I, for one, had missed his smile and his springy, joyous walk.

"No," he replied in answer to my question, "I'm not directing Buster. I only wrote his story."

"— And we bought it just as we'd buy anybody's story — if it was a good one," vehemently put in the official. I suppose he was provoked at having another interviewer nosing about. But I'm a reasonable person, and meant little or no harm. My reflections were interrupted suddenly by — "Can you write a good comedy?"

"Oh, no — I couldn't!" I stammered hastily, as if accused of being smart enough to burgle a bank.

"Well, darn few can. And Roscoe, here, has turned out a great one. Why? Because he knows the screen and knows comedy. We paid him a flat rate for it just as we pay anyone else from whom we buy."

"Does his name go on the screen?" I demanded, hoping at last for a loophole in these defences.

"We never put anyone's name on the screen — except Buster's and the cast's."

During this discussion, Arbuckle had gone over to the unshaven pup and moved him to a cooler place in the shade. He remained for a few moments talking to the dog and petting him. As he returned, the official made his excuses and went about his duties.

So far the interview had been rather difficult. I was glad to talk with Arbuckle alone. He, at least, seemed to feel that I was not going to broadcast lurid tales of infamy regarding him.

"Yes," he said, leaning against the wall a little wearily. "They paid me a flat rate for the scenario. I was pretty glad to get it. I'm broke, you see, and in debt. I was cleaned out by the first trial.

"Everybody thinks I am under contract with Mr. Schenck. But I'm not under contract or under salary to anybody. I stay around this studio in the capacity of author of Buster's current scenario.

"All that was done for me during the three trials was done out of friendship. I have five or six friends in the world, I believe, and I owe them everything. The theatrical public and the general public have not only turned against me, but have made me an object of their scorn and dislike.

"Mr. Schenck's contract with me was turned over to Famous Players-Lasky and when the big mix-up came it was automatically cancelled.

"The money paid me for Buster's story is the first I've had since my Lasky salary checks stopped.

"Future plans? I have none, and can have none until Mr. Hays makes his decision regarding me. This decision may come in a week and it may come in six months. I can only wait."

I found Arbuckle much changed after his nine months of trouble. Last August he was carefree, happy, joking. Today he is — strangely enough, not embittered — but subdued. Every move he makes is watched by reporters anxious to make a scoop on a sensation.

Every word he has uttered during and since the trial has been twisted and given a sinister or outrageous meaning. During the trial reporters whose first meeting with Arbuckle was in the courtroom, showed him the conclusions they had drawn from the day's testimony. In one instance the article closed with the words, "The day was favorable to Arbuckle." When the story was printed, it was distorted and deleted to give the prosecution the victory. This is only one of many similar incidents.

Two nights ago Arbuckle went with a Schenck official and the official's wife, to Sunset Inn, a beach restaurant, for dinner. They went in the official's car. When they stopped in front of Sunset, Federal officers told them, as they stepped to the sidewalk, that they were searching all cars for liquor. They were told to go ahead.

They looked through the sidepockets and found nothing. The party went inside, dined and danced. When they came out, they found the machine in a state of disorder. Cushions were on the floor, rugs were in heaps — the floor boards had even been taken up.

Persecution is a strong word and a cruel one. The initial big persecution has narrowed down to a series of petty, stupid annoyances.

No matter what Arbuckle was or was not guilty of, he has been severely punished. Once one of the wealthiest of picture people — living on money earned by hard work and earnest effort — he now stands before a taunting world stripped of his last dollar. In addition, he is heavily in debt. He has no job and he is forbidden, at least for a period of months, from working in the only profession he knows — motion pictures.

I repeat, no matter of what Arbuckle was or was not guilty, he has been severely punished. Let's forget it, and use all our influence — it is collectively strong, you movie-goers — to bring him back.



The Waiters Ball (Keystone-Mutual 6/25/16)

This article was reprinted from the July 29th, 1922 issue of *Movie Weekly*, pages 7 & 31.

The magazine comes from the collection of Dave and Ali Stevenson

those snappy, form-fitting suits you see advertised. They had one thing in common, however: they both had wives. Tommy's was a pippin, a dashing blonde with 'class' to spare. Harry's was a cute little thing. Very domestic. Cared naught for clothes, but loved her home and kitchen. Oh boy! How she could cook! Then came the big smash. Tommy, half starved at home, thought he couldn't live without Mrs. Miller's cooking. Harry was sure his happiness depended upon 'stepping out' with the dashing Mrs. Robbins. They talked it over calmly. Divorce was the only solution, but not until they had swapped wives for a week! A clever, breezy, humorous story. If you want a flock of laughs see the outcome of their experiment."

So Long Letty (10/17/20). Christie Film Co. Directed by Al Christie. With: Colleen Moore (Grace Miller), T. Roy Barnes (Harry Miller), Walter Hiers (Tommy Robbins), Grace Darmond (Letty Robbins.)

HEAD OVER HEELS

by Rob Farr

Long thought lost, the 1922 Mabel Normand feature *Head Over Heels* is slated to be screened at the 2005 Slapsticon in Arlington, Virginia and Washington, DC from July 28th-31st, 2005.

The story of *Head Over Heels* and its rediscovery is a fascinating one. Filmed during the summer of 1920, the production was the last feature that Mabel Normand made under a contract with Samuel Goldwyn. Soon after completion, Normand complained about working conditions on the Goldwyn lot (16 features in two years!) and asked to be released from her contract. After a brief hiatus, she was signed by her former producer, mentor, and lover, Mack Sennett, and began production on *Molly O'*. Despite a strong supporting cast made up of the likes of Raymond Hatton and Adolphe Menjou, *Head Over Heels* languished unreleased for nearly two years.

The plot seemed tailor-made for Normand's physical talents. Tina Bambinetti, a scruffy itinerant acrobat, literally goes from rags to riches when she is groomed for stardom by a Hollywood talent agent. As with many of the Cinderella plots that Normand filmed, Tina must make the ultimate choice between love and her career.

By the time the public finally saw *Head Over Heels* in April of 1922, both Normand and Goldwyn were facing the crises of their lives. Samuel Goldwyn was losing his position at the studio that bore his name. By 1924 a merger with Metro Pictures and Louis B. Mayer would culminate in the birth of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, but Goldwyn would be long gone. Mabel Normand was reeling from the tragedy of the murder of director William Desmond Taylor on February 1st, 1922. As she was one of the last people to see Taylor alive, the press targeted Normand as a prime suspect and the sensitive actress never fully recovered from the crushing publicity.

Head Over Heels was scarcely reviewed and quickly disappeared, joining the majority of silent films in the oblivion of the lost. Only one other feature in Normand's 16 made for Goldwyn survived. After making a handful of features for Mack Sennett, followed by a few shorts for Hal

Roach, Mabel Normand tragically died in 1930 at the age of 37.

Fast-forward four decades. Andover, Massachusetts. The Porter family moves into a home that is empty except for five cans of film. Not thinking much about it, they keep the reels stored in the basement and they are thus forgotten for another generation. In 2001, son Kevin Porter becomes curious about the reels and consults with film historian Steve Massa, who immediately determines the film to be a one-of-a-kind print of a lost film. Following a search for a sponsor who will preserve the film, *Head Over Heels* is turned over to the American Film Institute. Upon inspection the nitrate film stock is discovered to be in almost pristine condition. The AFI arranges for a new negative to be made and strikes the print that will be shown at Slapsticon in Arlington, Virginia on the evening of Friday, July 29th.

The story of *Head Over Heels* is one of those miracle survival stories that shouldn't happen, but sometimes do. Why were those five cans abandoned in that house in Andover? And what kind of a film is *Head Over Heels*? As of this writing, no one has seen the print except for lab technicians and some AFI staffers. But regardless of the merits of the film, it is an opportunity to experience one of the greatest silent comediennees at a critical moment in her career, preserved in a gorgeous 35mm print. And the lucky attendees at Slapsticon will be among the first to see it.



Courtesy of Rob Farr

ALL IN THE LINE OF DUTY

Compiled by Steve Massa

Accidents and injuries were everyday occurrences in the making of silent comedies.

Here are some items, transcribed verbatim, on comedians, both celebrated and forgotten, who suffered, and in a couple of cases gave their all, for their art.

MERMAID DIRECTOR HURT

While engaged in making "April Fool," the sixth of the Mermaid Comedies released through Educational Exchanges, in which Lloyd Hamilton is starred, Charles Parrott, the director, was painfully injured when an old shot-gun exploded in his hands. He was severely burned about the face and hands but work was held up only a few days.

In order to obtain a trick effect the gun was attached by wire to a switchboard and the explosion is said to have been caused by the property man unexpectedly closing the switch while Parrott was instructing Hamilton in a particular bit of business. *Moving Picture World* - 10/30/1920, pg. 1280

BETTY MAY TO STAR IN AL HERMAN COMEDY

A special attraction in the new Century Comedy directed by Al Herman and starring Lee Moran will be Betty May who is to be featured in it.

Miss May, who has fully recovered from her bruises when a Ford used in a comedy, tipped over throwing her and George Monberg into a ditch filled with sharp stones, which necessitated bandages on both arms and prevented her appearance before the camera for several weeks.

Motion Picture News - 9/30/1922, pg. 1649

LEO WHITE MEETS WITH ACCIDENT

Leo White, who is doing lead work with Billy West in Bulls Eye Comedies at the Hollywood Studios, met with a painful accident last week when a "trick" automobile with which Billy West is making "The Chauffeur," his forthcoming comedy, collapsed at the wrong moment. Leo was under the car, when a mis-cue resulted in the vehicle dropping on him. When the dismayed studio hands extricated Leo, the latter found he was shy two teeth. Leo submitted to slight medical attention and insisted on the work going on.

Moving Picture World - 3/1/1919, pg. 1239

CAMERA AND STUNTMEN KILLED IN PLANE CRASH

Alvin Knechtel, cameraman for First National, and William Hauber, film stuntman, were instantly killed July 17, in an airplane crash. Knechtel was piloting the single control plane while searching for a location to stage a crackup the following day for "The Aviator."

Work on the picture had been held up for several days due to Knechtel's illness. On the day of the crash, he insisted on resuming work and went up with Hauber. A commercial flyer who passed by close to Knechtel's ship said he noticed Knechtel suddenly slumped across the stick. Cameraman-pilot is believed to have fainted. Plane crashed into a barley field near Reseda.

Variety - 7/24/1929

Marie Dressler, who some time ago signed with the Keystone, has cancelled all contracts for one year on account of an accident. Miss Dressler was in a comedy picture on the Venice pier, and while standing near the unfenced edge of the structure, an automobile backed into her, knocking her off. She fell into the sea below, tearing her hand painfully and suffering several other injuries.

Moving Picture World - 7/4/1914, pg. 50

LILLIAN PEACOCK DIES

Lillian M. Webb, known professionally as Lillian Peacock, died recently at the home of her parents in Los Angeles. She will be remembered for her work in scores of Universal made comedies. Her death followed a year of illness, which was said to be due to internal injury received when she fell from an automobile during the filming of a scene.

Motion Picture News - 9/14/1918, pg. 4

Monte Banks has returned from Youngstown, Ohio, after a complete recovery from a recent fracture of the hip bone which was set by the famous specialist "Bone Setter" Reese at Youngstown. He will immediately resume production of comedies under the direction of Ward Hayes.

Motion Picture News - 1/18/1922, pg. 2535

Billie Ritchie, of the L-Ko comedy forces, was working in a picture and his suspenders became entangled in the propeller of an aeroplane, which was used off-stage to create a wind effect. Before stage hands could come to his rescue the famous comedians trousers were torn to shred.

Motion Picture News - 8/5/1916, pg. 932

ALICE HOWELL IN RUNAWAY BALLOON

Last week while taking balloon scenes for the L-Ko's latest feature "The Balloon Bandits," featuring Alice Howell, the balloon with Miss Howell in it, broke away from its hangar and Miss Howell had some joyride in said balloon for over five miles. Due to Miss Howell's presence of mind she was rescued by some kindly farmers by throwing a rope to them and they helped her get down.

Motion Picture News - 12/2/1916, pg. 3461

HANK MANN ILL

Hank Mann, film comedian, who is suffering from a nervous breakdown following an accident has closed down his studio for an indefinite period and gone to Yosemite for a rest until he has completely recovered.

Moving Picture World - 10/2/1920, pg. 635

HANK MANN IS NOT ILL

Arrow Film Corporation, distributing the Hank Mann Comedies, states that information in our Los Angeles letter published in the last issue to the effect that Mann has suffered a nervous breakdown and the studio is closed for an indefinite period is incorrect. Morris Schlank, the producer of the Mann Comedies, who is in New York, advises Arrow that such is not the case, but that Hank Mann's absence from the studio was account of business reasons and that production work was not interrupted.

Moving Picture World - 10/9/1920, pg. 778